

Manila Women's Forum

A Network of Women Professionals

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CHINESE ANTIQUES ENTICE MEMBERS, DESPITE THE TYPHOON

By Margaret Hollander

About 30 MWF members met at the home of Cecilia Leung last month to learn more about Chinese antique furniture. Cecilia lives in Noble House Antiques gallery in North Forbes, surrounded by exquisite furniture and accessories from China and Tibet.

We feasted on the delicious food brought by the attending members and then sat down by the pool to hear Cecilia's talk. No sooner had she started than the rain began, pouring down with such force that we could barely hear her. We quickly repaired inside and Cecilia gave us a guided tour of the rooms while she told us about the different styles of furniture and the woods from which they are made.

Cecilia, a Canadian citizen, was born in Macau, and moved to Manila from Toronto six years ago. She said she could not tell us enough about Chinese antique furniture if she had a year, but did her best to share some highlights. Three years ago she joined Noble House Antiques, founded by Ruby Nazir. They buy all their wares in China from government dealers (the only legal way), and have their own craftspeople in southern China who refinish the items to their specifications before they are shipped to Manila. When they purchase the furniture much of it looks worn and dirty, and most of the furniture is lacquered. The craftsmen painstakingly scrape down each piece using a glass shard, and then the wood is refinished—either re-lacquered or stained and polished to show off the beautiful grain.

Most of Noble House Antiques' collection was crafted between 1820 and 1890, a few as late as the 1920s, and each is meticulously recorded

with its place of origin, materials used, and the estimated date of manufacture. Some of the accessories on display are excellent reproductions and Cecilia is happy to explain when and how the originals were made.

Throughout Chinese history, the design of the furniture reflects the life style of the times. The main characteristics one should consider before buying are design, decoration, craftsmanship, and material.

Excavation of old tombs show that furniture-making was established as early as the Tang dynasty (618-907) when people were beginning to sit on chairs and use tables. Design and decoration reached its prime during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) with refined and elegant design, beautiful proportions, and meticulous craftsmanship. The wealth of the upper classes enabled them to create a cultured and intellectual environment and their furniture reflects this with simple lines, in pieces often crafted from tropical hardwoods, and with small areas of decoration in the form of wood carving, stone inlay, and decorative metal hardware. Most furniture and accessories from the Ming dynasty are in museums and private collections—if you can find a piece today the price is prohibitive.

Today, most of the Chinese antiques available were made during the Quing dynasty, which lasted from 1644 to 1911. The designs are similar to those from the Ming dynasty, but the decoration is more elaborate, with extensive wood carving and engraved metal hardware. The woods from Southeast Asia used during the Ming dynasty were disappearing and most of the furniture is made from woods such as ju, nam mu, elm, and

bamboo. Occasionally rosewood, peach, and camphor are found from this era. Most lacquered items are made of elmwood.

During the 1800s we can see the influence of European design in Chinese furniture combining both Western and Asian elements. Noble House is starting a collection of these pieces and their popularity is increasing.

Cecilia explained that to be labeled an "antique" in China the item must be more than 100 years old. Many items found in the Philippines are more likely to be recently reconstructed using old wood. When the wood is cut is the critical determinant of the furniture's age. To obtain a more accurate dating, the patina (the accumulated build-up of dirt, especially around hinges and hardware) can be chemically analyzed. All of Cecilia's furniture

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Next MWF Meeting

When: Monday, August 18, 6:30 p.m.

What: Several MWF entrepreneurs will speak about their products or services, followed by a mini-bazaar. Products include textiles and silk, organic and Mexican food, jewelry, and children's books.

Where: Kathy Vignali's house, 1679 Dasmariñas Ave., Dasmariñas Village, Makati

Bring: A contribution to the potluck dinner.

Sept. meeting: Sept. 15

Antiques (from page 1)

pieces are bona fide antiques crafted at least 100 years ago.

Many people are concerned that furniture purchased here could split or crack when taken to Europe or the United States. Chinese furniture is made of small pieces of wood, often obviously "loose" or with the joints clearly visible or open. This is done deliberately so the wood can expand and contract as the temperature and humidity change. To protect your furniture the temperature must be constant. Radical changes in temperature, not in humidity, is the crucial element. But if your house is centrally heated in a northern climate and the humidity is low it is helpful

to put a cup of water inside a cabinet to avoid dryness. It's always good to have a humidifier in the same room with antiques to protect the wood from dryness.

Besides furniture, Cecilia has small accessories such as scroll-holders, brush holders, curios, small boxes, and sculptures that have become collectibles. Unfortunately, many of the small objects d'art were destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and today these can cost even more than the large items of furniture.

Cecilia is delighted to explain the details of her furniture to anyone interested. Call her in advance to make sure she is available at 810-7093 or e-mail to noble.mal@pacific.net.ph.

Many of us will be returning soon to learn more—and likely with our checkbooks in hand! For those who weren't able to attend, Noble House is behind the red gates at 44 McKinley Road, opposite the Rustan's/Santi's supermarket plaza.



Crescent desk and horseshoe chairs

The Manila Women's Forum

The Manila Women's Forum (MWF) is a cross-cultural network for women. It provides opportunities to build friendships, to talk to women of various cultures, and to share information about resources. Our meetings are intended to provide intellectual stimulation and lead to personal and professional development. All women are welcome to join. The current officers are **Lisa Lumbao**, Chair, Programs, Treasurer, and Newsletter. **Penny Poole and Susan Nishihiira**, Programs. **Beaulah P. Taguiwalo**, Newsletter.

Cost of membership is P300 per year. Members receive a copy of the current mailing list in addition to the newsletter. A contribution is collected at each monthly meeting: P20 for members, and P40 for non-members. Please contact Lisa Lumbao at Tel. 818-2887 or 813-0168, or at lumbao@mozcom.com for more information about MWF.

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